

## **LEBANON CUSTOMS**

### **Greetings:**

When one meets a stranger, acquaintance, or friend, it is important to exchange greetings, to inquire about the person's health and family, and in general to make polite small talk before getting down to any specific business.

Upon meeting or parting, close friends and relatives often “kiss the air” as they brush both cheeks. Urban residents use this custom with either gender, but in rural areas, only members of the same sex might greet in this manner—unless the two people are related.

Personal space is somewhat limited, and people may stand close in conversation. The most common greeting is *Marhaba* (Hello). Urbanites might also use the French *Bonjour* (Good day), *Salut* (Hello), an English *Hi*, or the Arabic *Keef halik?* (How are you?) for women or *Keef halak?* for men.

### **Gestures:**

The Lebanese signify “yes” with one downward nod and “no” with an upward movement of the head or raised eyebrows, sometimes accompanied by tongue clicking. One can also express “no” by shaking the index finger from side to side, palm facing out.

Pointing or beckoning with the index finger is impolite. To beckon to another person, one waves all fingers with the palm facing down.

For many, it is offensive to pass or receive objects with the left hand. The right hand or both hands are preferred.

People may cross the legs at the knee, but crossing an ankle over a knee risks offending any person toward whom the bottom of the foot points. One points the soles of the shoes or feet down toward the earth and not at another person.

Eye contact is important. Men avoid cursing in front of women. Public displays of affection, even between married couples, are not acceptable.

### **Holidays:**

National holidays are set by the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Islamic holy days follow the lunar calendar, which is shorter than the Gregorian year by about 11 days.

National holidays include New Year's Day, Labor Day (1 May), and Independence Day (22 Nov.). Christian holidays include Easter (Friday through Sunday), Assumption (15 Aug.), and Christmas.